

The Call of the Bluebirds



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Part I: Overview of Business

The Dubuque County Conservation Board was created in 1957 by a vote of the Dubuque County citizens. Dubuque County Conservation Parks and Recreations offers “Something for Everyone” year round. Whether you want to spend time viewing scenic vistas along the Mississippi River, learn about the county’s rugged natural beauty and cultural heritage, take a leisurely hike or bike ride, play a competitive round of golf, cross-country skiing, winter hiking, snowmobiling, or ice fishing, Dubuque County has the facilities.

Swiss Valley Nature Preserve was established in 1973 as a move to preserve the scenic beauty and significance of the area settled in the 1830’s by Swiss immigrants. The preserve provides areas for hiking, camping, fishing, viewing nature, and other adult and children outdoor activities and programs.

Part II: Job Specifics

Monitoring bluebird houses involves the following steps.

- Clearing predators and competitors from the nestboxes such as paper wasps, mice, and wren nests.
- Treating fledglings for gnats.
- Recording number of bluebird eggs or hatched young found in the nest.
- Reporting bluebird survey results to NABS.

Part III: Introduce the Problem

- Eastern Bluebird populations fell in the early twentieth century as aggressive introduced species such as Wrens, European Starlings and House Sparrows made available nest holes increasingly difficult for bluebirds to hold on to.

Part IV: Background

- Content knowledge that a student needs to solve the problem includes facts about bluebird habitats, as well as their anatomy, life cycle, and ecological impact on our environment. Information about the construction of bluebird houses and about the process involved in data collection is necessary, also.
- Volunteers are needed to build, install, and monitor bluebird houses in the area.
- Link for NABS: <http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>

Part V: Business Solution

- In the 1960s and 1970s establishment of bluebird trails and other nestbox campaigns alleviated much of this competition, especially after people began using nest - boxes designed to keep out the larger European Starling. Eastern Bluebird numbers have been recovering since.
- Nestboxes need to be checked weekly at a minimum and cleared of wasps’ nests and wren’s nest. While checking nest boxes, a survey of contents is completed. Survey results are contributed to a national data collection site sponsored by the North American Bluebird Society (NABS).

Part VI: Student Solutions

- Solutions that students might come up with include new designs for bluebird nestboxes that are more user friendly and more suitable locations for installing new bluebird nestboxes.